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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 000395

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#) [ICTY](#)

SUBJECT: REACTIONS, PLANS AFTER MILOSEVIC'S DEATH

Classified By: Ambassador Michael Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (c) The Belgrade body politic is just in the initial throes of reacting to Milosevic's death. Current debate swirls around his funeral arrangements and increasing speculation that the former dictator was at best medically neglected, at worst actively poisoned during his incarceration in The Hague. Milosevic's death, coming on the heels of the Babic suicide and the unfettering of Haradinaj, s ability to engage in public life are leading to an increase) even among some democrats) in the belief that ICTY is anti-Serb. The Radicals and Socialists will undoubtedly do what they can to use this to bolster their political standing and re-orient the government's ICTY policies. End summary.

SATURDAY

12. (u) The initial cautious response by local networks to news of Milosevic's death on March 11 gave way later in the day to more prominent coverage on Belgrade TV stations. There were interviews and commentary by the Radical and Socialist party) mostly anti-Hague diatribes and unhelpful commentary on the bias of the court and its alleged role in the deaths of Milosevic and Milan Babic, who committed suicide in his cell on March 5. Head of the DS caucus in parliament Dusan Petrovic gave a helpful interview on RTS rejecting any suggestions that there would be any change in the government's policy towards The Hague or any reason to reconsider its international legal obligations. CNN and other international coverage was perhaps more pervasive throughout the day, and included phone interviews with current and former regional leaders, but consisted mostly of empty speculation and commentary on the unreformed and unrepentant parts of Serbian society and the tragic events of the Milosevic era. The Ambassador's statement was quickly picked up by local TV stations and aired prominently.

SUNDAY

13. (u) By Sunday, March 12, media attention had slackened considerably on local stations, with most channels showing regular programming for most or all of the day. So far, there have been no large organized or spontaneous public gatherings related to the news, though Socialist Party headquarters announced over the weekend they would open a condolence book and would encourage placement of flowers outside the party's offices on Studentski Trg. Over the weekend, a line of (mostly) pensioners numbering in the hundreds formed at the party headquarters, and moderate numbers also placed flowers or lit candles at the Studentski Trg location and in other party offices throughout Serbia and in The Hague.

14. (c) The Ambassador spoke with President Tadic, Deputy PM Labus, and FONMIN Draskovic on the occasion of a commemoration of the third anniversary of the Djindjic assassination to prepare the path for discouraging any kind of official funeral or commemorative event. Draskovic used the opportunity to push again his long-held belief that ICTY conditionality on PFP membership and the EU membership process should cease, so that a Euro-Atlantic embrace could be used to counter Radical and Socialist opposition to Serbia's integration. Tadic, Draskovic, and Labus firmly opposed any state funeral arrangements for Milosevic, while Tadic added that he would oppose any &pardon8 for Milosevic widow Mira Markovic in order for her to attend funeral events in Serbia. (Note: Markovic faces arrest on an Interpol warrant on charges of inciting abuse of public office if she returns to Serbia. It is unclear if, under current circumstances, GoS officials would be prepared to enforce that warrant. The Milosevic family lawyer on Monday filed a motion in Belgrade district court to have the warrant rescinded and the charges dropped. End note.)

MONDAY

15. (u) By Monday, March 13, all major print media were also carrying the news from the weekend, along with initial reactions from various political parties, including

re-hashing of the SRS and SPS's predictable positions and expressions of regret by PM Kostunica, who promised that the government would ask for a full report from The Hague on the circumstances of his death. He noted the political custom in Serbia at difficult times for Serbs to put all political differences aside. Tadic's office expressed condolences for the family) sources there have expressed their concern that there was no way to react without benefiting the Radicals. The most vitriolic response came from Draskovic, whose SPO party was a target of Milosevic. Draskovic said any grief over Milosevic's death shown by Serbian citizens was shameful in light of the pain Milosevic had inflicted on Serbia. Also on Monday, the Supreme Defense Council of SaM met (by telephone) and rejected proffering any military honors on Milosevic if a funeral is held in Serbia.

(AND THE DAYS AHEAD

16. (c) Speculation now has turned to where and under what circumstances Milosevic will be buried. Tadic has said publicly that a state funeral would be out of the question, a position publicly shared by ruling coalition partners G-17 Plus and SPO. Kostunica's DSS and the government have so far been silent on the issue, while SPS and SRS seem to be pressing hard for Milosevic to receive full head of state honors. UK Ambassador Gowan raised the funeral issue with Kostunica's Foreign Affairs Advisor Vladeta Jankovic and received an icy response and a comment about interference in internal affairs. Jankovic refused to pass along Gowan's concerns absent a formal written demarche. Meanwhile, Markovic is rumored to have argued alternately for Milosevic to be buried in Moscow or in his hometown of Pozarevac.

17. (c) There is some confusion regarding who has final authority to grant Head of State honors and interment in the special section of the Belgrade Central Cemetery reserved for historically important figures and former presidents. The city council (run by DS Mayor Bogdanovic), which has a role in the approval process, has already balked at approving Milosevic's burial in the special section, and absent a specific request from the family for such treatment (we understand none has been made yet) to force the question, it would appear a Belgrade funeral with full honors is unlikely. Furthermore, the Supreme Defense Council's decision would, on the face of it, preclude the possibility of a state funeral in any location in Serbia, as such an event would include a color guard, caisson procession, fusillade, and/or similar honors that the military now will not provide. However, funeral plans are still in the wildly speculative stages, so it may be a few days before this all plays out.

18. (c) We understand from reliable sources that the Radicals and Socialists are already cooperating on plans for public events and commemorations aimed at touching off another round of anti-Hague fury. It is not clear how well such demonstrations (or the funeral) might be attended -- the SRS rally in support of Seselj several weeks ago was a dud -- but there is likely to be more support for any protest against the ICTY following Milosevic's death. Indeed, despite the low opinion of Milosevic and his regime, recent events in The Hague) a more permissive attitude towards Haradinaj's public life, the Babic suicide (under what locally are considered suspicious circumstances), the interpretation of Chief Prosecutor del Ponte's recent comments that the tribunal is sensitive to political pressure, and the recent assertions by Milosevic himself that he was given improper medication (which Monday reprints of Dutch TV reports of the autopsy did nothing to dispel) -- have intensified a local perception of anti-Serb bias in the tribunal. Even pro-Western Serb politicians, most prominently former PM Zivkovic, have criticized the recent series of unfortunate events in The Hague as a disgrace to the tribunal.

IMPACT

19. (c) There is a good chance that this chain of recent events, and their locally scandalous nature, will, in this fertile ground for conspiracy theorists, lend support to those looking to stall any more cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. The government will face real pressure -- at the very least on humanitarian and medical grounds -- to review its ICTY policy and to reconsider domestic prosecution for indictees who have not been turned over or are in pre-trial release, to ease any kind of efforts on delivering Mladic (not rumored to be in the best of health) or cooperating with The Hague in general. There are several Serb indictees on pre-trial release (e.g., Simatovic, Pavkovic and Stanisic, the latter two with their own serious health problems) and we expect they will use their influence and connections to encourage this debate. The government may try and make the case for de-linking EU accession from the Hague issue to avoid any "political instability." At the very least, we should expect SPS to use its position as "kingmaker" for this minority coalition government to extract maximum political gain from the situation) to include a rehabilitation of

Mira Markovic and a hard push for full state honors for the deceased dictator. We are engaging with the PM's office to elicit their plans for the coming days and to encourage them to stand with SPO, G-17 Plus, DS, and most average Serbs to oppose a state funeral for Milosevic.

POLT